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ABSTRACT

A study of 215 inactive students (1973 to the end of the summer semester 1977) of the School of Technical Careers (STC) Baccalaureate Program was conducted to answer three questions: (1) How do inactive students differ from graduates?; (2) Why did they leave the Baccalaureate Program?; and (3) What have they done since leaving the program? Major conclusions of the study include the following: inactives expressed a satisfaction with the program, and most said they left because of financial considerations or personal reasons; inactives tended to have different academic backgrounds from most graduates, as the typical inactive had transferred from either another school or a non-STC department; while the academic potential of inactives and graduates was similar, inactives tended to have a lower grade point average; and since leaving the program, few inactives have continued their education. (JH)

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THE SCHOOL OF TECHNICAL CAREERS BACCALAUREATE PROGRAM: A STUDY OF INACTIVE STUDENTS

by

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SECTION I

INTRODUCTION

This is the age of academic accountability. Responding to pressures, both internal and external, institutions are developing a self-consciousness, attempting to understand their impact upon students and society. The Baccalaureate Program in the School of Technical Careers at SIU-C is an example of a program exhibiting this new sense of responsibility. Even in this age of accountability, the Baccalaureate Program's efforts devoted to ongoing evaluations of processes and outcomes are noteworthy. The results of these departmental sef-studies are also impressive, showing graduates happy with both the program and their present careers. While these studies provide information on the Baccalaureate Program's adequacy from the perspective of graduates, they leave unanswered questions regarding the program's quality from the point of view of those who left before receiving a degree. This study was an attempt to fill this gap, providing information about these students and hopefully enabling the Baccalaureate Program to better serve future students.

PROBLEM

From its inception in 1973 until the end of the summer semester of 1977, approximately 686 students left the Baccalaureate Program (Table 1). Most of these students can be accounted for: 399 were graduates, 46 transferred to other programs, 15 were dropped for not having a Learning Contract, 6 were suspended and 5 were known to be taking courses elsewhere in order to complete STC Baccalaureate Program requirements.

There were still, however, 215 students for whom no information on why they left was available. This study attempted to answer three broad questions concerning these inactive students: (1) How do inactive students differ from graduates? (2) Why did inactive students leave the Baccalaureate Program? (3) What have inactive students done since leaving the Baccalaureate Program?

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF FORMER BACCALAUREATE STUDENTS BY TYPE OF TERMINATION AS OF SUMMER SEMESTER, 1978.

	#	%
TOTAL	686	100.0
GRADUATES	399	58.0
INACTIVES	215	32.0
DROPPED - No Learning Contract	15	2.0
TAKING WORK ELSEWHERE	5	1.0
TRANSFERRED	46	7.0

The first question is important for it can give insight into the Baccalaureate Program's ability to meet the needs of students of varying types and backgrounds. Comparisons were made using the department'scomputer data file. Questions asked were:

1. Do inactives and graduates differ in biographic characteristics?
2. Do inactives and graduates differ in academic potential and background?
3. Do inactives and graduates differ in Capstone status, Learning Contract status, total hours completed and terms in the program?
4. Do inactives and graduates differ in academic performance?

The question concerning inactive students' reasons for leaving the Baccalaureate Program was explored by way of questionnaire. It was done straightforwardly, simply asking inactives why they left the Program and if they would ever consider returning to the Program.

The third question (What have inactives done since leaving the Program?) can provide further insight into the nature of inactive students chiefly by showing whether these students had a continued interest in obtaining a Bachelor's degree. Questions asked were:

1. Do inactives obtain employment which involves skills obtained in Associate degree programs?
2. What action did inactives take upon leaving the Baccalaureate?
3. How many inactives have obtained a Bachelor's degree since leaving the Baccalaureate?
4. What is the present employment status of inactive students?

By answering questions concerning the differences between inactives and graduates, the reason inactives left the Baccalaureate and their action since leaving, this study should prove beneficial in both administrative and advisement processes in the Baccalaureate Program. It might point out weaknesses in the program, providing information which will increase retention and thus improve departmental efficiency. Also, this study can potentially be of help to advisors, providing them with information on the special needs of certain student groups.

SECTION II

DATA BASE COMPARISONS OF INACTIVES AND GRADUATES

Possible differences between Baccalaureate graduates and inactives were explored using the department's extensive computer data file. Because, at the time of this study, not all information was available for Fall 1977 inactives and graduates, only those who left the program prior to that term were included in the comparisons. Not all desirable comparisons were possible; there were, however, enough categories to provide some insight into how inactives differ from graduates. Once again, the main categories of comparison were: biographic characteristics, academic background, program status, and academic performance.

BIOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Using the Baccalaureate data file, three biographic comparisons of graduates and inactives were possible. The first is the age of these past students; it might be hypothesized that older more mature students would be more likely to complete the program. The next two categories are the sex and race of these former students; it might be conjectured that the program could not, in some way, meet the needs of women or minority students.

As shown in Tables 2, 3, and 4, there is no significant difference between Baccalaureate graduates and inactives in any of these categories. The present age of the two groups is almost identical and while overall enrollment of females and minority students is low, these students are no more likely to drop out than males or white students.

TABLE 2

PRESENT AGE OF GRADUATES AND INACTIVES

	n	Average Age
Graduates	388	27
Inactives	202	27

TABLE 3

SEX OF GRADUATES AND INACTIVES

	Total #	Total %	Male %	Female %
Graduates	390	100.0	75.1	24.9
Inactives	202	100.0	72.8	27.2

TABLE 4

MINORITY STATUS OF GRADUATES AND INACTIVES

	Total #	Total %	White %	Minority %
Graduates	389	100.0	93.8	6.2
Inactives	200	100.0	94.0	6.0

Academic Background

The outcomes of a program are, to a large extent, shaped by student inputs. The Baccalaureate data file will allow for two comparisons of the academic input or background of students. The first is the ACT scores of graduates and inactives. These scores give an indication of achievement prior to college and are a somewhat useful predictor of academic performance in college. It would seem possible that those who graduated were more academically inclined, as reflected in higher ACT scores, than those who did not complete the program. The second background comparison was made on the previous program type of graduate and inactives. While Baccalaureate students have proven themselves in non-technical areas, perhaps students without technical background have trouble adapting to technical subject matters.

ACT and previous program comparisons are presented in Tables 5 and 6. The ACT scores of graduates and inactives are almost identical, indicating that inactives have as much academic potential as graduates. The previous program

comparison is a bit more interesting. While 63% of all Baccalaureate graduates come from one of the STC two-year programs, only 47% of the inactives come from one of these programs. Most inactives had either transferred from another school or from a non-STC department. While some transfer students come from technical programs, the low number of these students in the Capstone Program suggests that most have non-technical backgrounds. When the Chi-square statistic is applied to the program comparison, the results are significant beyond the .001 level.

TABLE 5

ACT COMPOSITE SCORE OF GRADUATES AND INACTIVES

	#	Average ACT
Graduates	218	20.3
Inactives	104	20.5

TABLE 6

SOURCE OF ENTRY OF GRADUATES AND INACTIVES

	Total		Transfer	STC Two Year	Other SIU
	#	%	%	%	%
Graduates	396	100.0	13.7	63.1	23.2
Inactives	211	100.0	21.8	46.9	31.3

PROGRAM STATUS

Four comparisons were made concerning the status within the Baccalaureate of graduates and inactives. They were: Capstone status, Learning Contract status, total hours passed and number of terms in the Baccalaureate program. The Capstone Program with its time-saving to the student, might prove an aid in student retention. In the other comparison, the direction of the results could be assumed

prior to the actual comparison. Graduates would be expected to have completed their Learning Contracts in greater numbers, have accumulated more credit hours, and have spent more terms in the Baccalaureate than inactives. These comparisons were made to answer questions regarding the degree of difference, in these categories, of former students.

Comparisons regarding Capstone status are presented in Tables 7 and 8. The Capstone accepted and applied categories were combined since some inactive students left the program before their applications had been processed. Table 7 shows that students who were not in the Capstone Program were more likely to leave the Baccalaureate before graudation than those who had applied to or been accepted; when the Chi-square statistic is applied, the results are significant at the .02 level. This difference might be because Capstone students come from technical programs, whose students have a high retention in the Baccalaureate (Table 6). When only those inactives and graduates who completed STC Associate programs are compared on Capstone status, there is no significantly different retention rate.

TABLE 7

CAPSTONE STATUS OF GRADUATES AND INACTIVES

	Total		Applied Or Accepted	Not Applied For
	#	%	%	%
Graduates	397	100.0	37.8	62.2
Inactives	209	100.0	28.2	71.8

TABLE 8

CAPSTONE STATUS OF GRADUATES AND INACTIVES - TRANSFERS FROM STC TWO-YEAR PROGRAMS ONLY

	Total		Applied Or Accepted	Not Applied For
	#	%	%	%
Graduates	249	100.0	42.6	57.4
Inactives	97	100.0	45.4	54.6

A comparison of Learning Contract status is presented in Table 9. Since a Learning Contract has not always been required, there were a large number of students who graduated without one on file. There was, however, a much greater percentage of inactives without a contract. This lack of a Learning Contract would seem to reflect a low level of commitment to the Baccalaureate Program. Recent efforts to insure quick completion of a Learning Contract will no doubt screen many students only marginally interested in the program.

TABLE 9

LEARNING CONTRACT STATUS OF GRADUATES AND INACTIVES

	Total		Approved Contract	No Contract
	#	%	%	%
Graduates	398	100.0	81.7	18.3
Inactives	210	100.0	61.0	39.0

Total credit hours and terms in the Baccalaureate are presented in Tables 10 and 11. An average graduate had taken 135 semester hours to complete his Bachelor's degree; inactives average 96 hours - over one full academic year less than graduates. As expected, graduates also spent a greater number of terms in the Baccalaureate: 3.8 terms as compared to 2.1 for inactives.

TABLE 10

AVERAGE TOTAL CREDIT HOURS OF GRADUATES AND INACTIVES

	#	Average Total Hours
Graduates	354	135.9
Inactives	177	96.2

TABLE 11

AVERAGE NUMBER OF TERMS SPENT IN THE BACCALAUREATE BY GRADUATES AND INACTIVES

	#	Average Number of Terms
Graduates	320	3.8
Inactives	204	2.1

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Grades are an accepted measure of academic performance. Since the academic potential of inactives and graduates is similar (Table 5), a comparison of grades would give some insight into the relative motivation of the two groups. It might be expected that students that completed the program were more motivated and thus had higher grades than students that left before graduation. Table 12 shows that graduates are indeed stronger academic peformers; when applying the t-test the results are significant beyond the .001 level. If the results are stratified into low, medium, and high GPA's (Table 13), it is shown that while there is a larger percentage of inactives with low averages, there is almost an equal percentage of inactives and graduates with high averages.

TABLE 12

AVERAGE GPA OF GRADUATES AND INACTIVES

	#	Average GPA
Graduates	354	2.87
Inactives	177	2.68

TABLE 13

STRATIFIED GPA OF GRADUATES AND INACTIVES

	Total		Less Than 2.25	2.25 To 3.25	Greater Than 3.25
	#	%	%	%	%
Graduates	354	100.0	11.0	62.1	26.8
Inactives	177	100.0	25.4	51.4	23.2

SECTION III

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

In April, 1977, a questionnaire was sent to 124 individuals who had left the Baccalaureate prior to graduation. Twenty-nine envelopes were returned as undeliverable. Of the remaining 95, there were 32 responses. Admittedly, this is a small sample and the results should not, of course, be accepted without some reservation. While an inadequate sample for academic research, the results can, however, give a general idea of inactive students' reasons for leaving, their attitude towards the Baccalaureate, and the extent of their continued academic interests.

REASONS FOR LEAVING THE BACCALAUREATE

The reasons students give for leaving a program are important; no matter how pleased graduates are with their preparation, if a large number of inactives state dissatisfaction, there exists the possibility that the program is in some way flawed. The reasons Baccalaureate inactives give for leaving, however, suggest that dissatisfaction with the program was a consideration of only a few students (Table 14). Most said that they left to seek employment or because of personal reasons. To further test the satisfaction of inactives, they were asked whether, if they returned to SIU, would they consider reentering the Baccalaureate (Table 15). More than 84% of the respondents indicated that they would reconsider the Baccalaureate.

TABLE 14

REASON FOR LEAVING THE BACCALAUREATE

	#	%
TOTAL	32	100.0
Change of Plans	2	6.3
Dissatisfaction with Baccalaureate	3	9.4
Dissatisfaction with SIU	4	12.5
Financial	14	43.8
Personal	5	15.6
Other	4	12.5

TABLE 15

INACTIVE STUDENTS WHO WOULD CONSIDER REENTERING THE BACCALAUREATE PROGRAM

	#	%
TOTAL	32	100.0
Would reconsider Baccalaureate	27	84.4
Would not reconsider Baccalaureate	5	15.6

SINCE LEAVING THE BACCALAUREATE

Information concerning the recent professional and academic activities of former students can provide further insight into the reasons why these students left the program. Questions were asked concerning the inactives' use of associate degree skills, their action upon leaving, whether they have yet obtained a degree and their present employment status.

The STC Baccalaureate is an unusual undergraduate program in that many of its students have already obtained marketable skills. Having those skills might have influenced the decision of some to leave school since obtaining employment would not be difficult. Inactives were asked if, since leaving the program, they have worked in a position involving skills learned in an associate degree program (Table 16). Half of the respondents said that they have been or are currently in such a position.

TABLE 16

INACTIVES USE OF SKILLS LEARNED IN ASSOCIATE DEGREE PROGRAMS

	#	%
Have been employed in position making use of Associate degree skills	16	50.0
Have not been employed in position making use of Associate degree skills	16	50.0

Whether inactives had a continued academic interest will say something about why they left the Baccalaureate. If most transferred to another program or continued school shortly after that, then perhaps their academic needs were not being met in the Baccalaureate. If, on the other hand, most inactives entered and stayed in the job market, it might reflect a low level of commitment to academic achievement. The information presented in tables 17, 18, and 19 suggest that many inactives are not at the moment interested in continuing their education. Upon leaving the Baccalaureate, less than 22% transferred to another school; only one surveyed inactive had received a bachelor's degree; and 78% were not presently enrolled in school.

TABLE 17

ACTION UPON LEAVING THE BACCALAUREATE PROGRAM

	#	%
TOTAL	32	100.0
Transferred to another school	7	21.9
Left School	25	78.1

TABLE 18

SURVEYED INACTIVES WHO HAVE COMPLETED A BACHELOR'S DEGREE

	#	%
TOTAL	32	100.0
Have completed a Bachelor's degree	1	3.1
Have not completed a Bachelor's degree	31	96.9

TABLE 19

PRESENT ACTIVITY OF SURVEYED INACTIVE STUDENTS

	#	%
TOTAL	32	100.0
Full-time student	2	6.3
School and work	5	15.6
Working	22	68.8
Unemployed	2	6.3

SECTION IV

Summary

Several interesting discoveries concerning inactive students have been made in this study. Some of the major ones bear repeating:

1. Inactives express a satisfaction with the Baccalaureate Program; most say they left the program because of financial considerations or personal reasons.

2. Inactives tend to have different academic backgrounds than most graduates. The typical inactive has transferred from either another school or a non-STC department; most graduates have come from STC associate degree programs.

3. While the academic potential of inactives and graduates is similar, inactives tend to have a lower GPA.

4. Since leaving the Baccalaureate, few inactives have continued their education.

Inactive students are, of course, a heterogeneous group. While allowing for individual differences, there does seem to be a larger group of these inactives that are of a different academic type than those who have graduates. Many of these former students have not had previous exposure to technical subject matter and a number seem to have a lower interest in academic achievement as reflected in their grades and their lack of interest in continuing their education.

APPENDIX

Comments of Surveyed Inactive Students

I did not like the people in the program I was in.

I think the program was fine; I never had any hassles with anybody about anything. In fact, Mr. Reynolds was the best advisor I've ever had. SIU was just gearing me up for a career I didn't want, a fact I found out a little late. I think the STC program is great if that's what your really into.

I found that the Baccalaureate Program was very weak in my field of Morturary Science. I guess it was due to the field. Since very little is known about it, by the people who teach the program.

I am now working toward a Bachelor's degree in vocational education. I hope to teach high school auto shop and drafting. From what I saw in your program I feel that it was very well organized, complete and very effective.

I intend to return to SIU in a year or two to pick up where I left off.

I was very happy to be part of the Baccalaureate Program at SIU-C. I don't know of any other school in my area that has such a program. This was exactly what I was looking for. I was sorry to say I had to leave.

SIU is a great school!

Stupid courses to help "round out my education."

The Baccalaureate Program counselor was informative and understanding. I would have pursued the program to its conclusion, but for a change in career plans. My experiences with the Baccalaureate Program were entirely satisfactory.

I was trying to get into the Dental Hygiene Program but did not get accepted and did not have another major to follow so I left school.

There was no coordination between STC and a Baccalaureate Program.

Not dissatisfied.

I was enrolled for Airport Management. There was no curriculum for that program. I didn't see any reason to continue.

Ruth Soderstrom was the best college advisor I ever had.